

BaptistWay Bible Series for April 10: Christians must display faith through actions_40405

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Christians must display faith through actions

Numbers 13:1-3, 17-20, 25-33; 14:1-10, 30-31

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This is the first of three lessons taken from the book of Numbers—named in the Greek Septuagint for two censuses recording the number of fighting men available to invade and occupy Canaan. The Hebrew title *bemidbar*, meaning "in the wilderness," gives a clearer meaning of the book's contents.

In addition to the censuses, Numbers records the events after the Israelites left the Sinai region, where they had been camped about a year while Moses received the Law and supervised building the tabernacle. God led the Israelites from "the wilderness of Sinai" (1:1) to the plains of Moab, just

across the Jordan River from Canaan (36:13).

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Numbers 1-12 recounts God's instructions for mobilizing the nation of Israel to invade and occupy Canaan. While still camped in the Sinai region, Moses directed a census showing a fighting force of 603,550, excluding the Levites. The camp was organized for encampment with the tabernacle in the center. Ordinances dealing with the holiness and separation of Israel were implemented, and the Levites, tabernacle, and Israel itself were dedicated to God.

The second Passover was observed, and the Israelites set out for Canaan, preceded by the ark of the covenant, following God in the form of a cloud. Once on the march, the Israelites complained again about the monotony of their diet and longed for the food of Egypt. Moses responded by appointing 70 elders to assist him in governing.

Migrating quail provided meat for the people but God, angry with the Israelites for complaining, sent a plague which killed many of them. The dead were buried at Kibroth Hattaavah. Aaron and Miriam complained of Moses' Cushite wife. God responded by reaffirming Moses as his chosen covenant mediator and striking Miriam with leprosy. God healed Miriam after intercession by Moses. This section closes with the Israelites camped in the Desert of Paran.

The focal passages for this lesson cover events after Israel has moved from the Sinai region into the Negev desert south of Canaan.

Numbers 13:1-3

God instructed Moses to send 12 men, one from each ancestral tribe, to explore Canaan. Moses sent the 12 men listed in 13:4-16.

Numbers 13:17-20

Moses gave detailed instructions for the spies to move through the Negev into the hill country of Canaan. They were to observe and report on the land and the inhabitants. The spies were to determine population and fortification of cities. Fertility of the land was to be determined by bringing back samples of agricultural produce.

Numbers 13:25-33

The scouts returned after 40 days and reported to an assembly of the leaders of Israelites. They reported the land was fertile and “flowed with milk and honey.” They exhibited grapes cut in the Valley of Eschol. But the inhabitants were powerful and the cities well fortified. The land was inhabited by descendents of Anak, along with Amalekites, Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites and Canaanites.

Caleb pointed out that the Israelites could conquer all of them and occupy the land. The other spies quickly spread rumors that inhabitants of Canaan were large and fierce. They had even seen Nephilim, giant descendents of Anak, who were so large and fierce the Israelites were like “grasshoppers” compared to them. (The Nephilim were first described in Genesis 6:4 as heroic beings, resulting from the union of heavenly beings with human women).

Numbers 14:1-10

The night following the spies' report, the Israelites assembled and complained they had been led out into the desert only to be killed and their wives and children taken as plunder. They threatened to go no further and to choose a new leader who would take them back to Egypt.

Moses and Aaron prostrated themselves before the assembly while Joshua and Caleb reminded the Israelites the Lord was pleased with them for their obedience. God would protect them as he led them into the land flowing with milk and honey. They should not fear the inhabitants since God was with the Israelites and they would swallow up the enemy. The inhabitants of Canaan had no protection since God was with the Israelites. But the assembly was unmoved and threatened to stone Caleb and Joshua.

Numbers 14:30-31

Because the Israelites failed to invade Canaan, the fighting men counted in the census at Sinai would die in the desert. Only Joshua and Caleb, who had remained faithful to God's direction, would be allowed to enter the Promised Land, along with the children. The children would become adults during the next 40 years and would conquer Canaan and build the nation of Israel.

God's plan to use his holy nation in their homeland to redeem the world to him could have been initiated within two years of their leaving Egypt. Instead, it was delayed 40 years because of a lack of faith, brought about by the negative report of 10 men. Only Caleb and Joshua would enter Canaan, rewarded for their faith in following God "wholeheartedly" (14:24).

Application

When God's will for our lives is evident and his direction is clear, we can be

certain he will provide the resources necessary to fulfill his purpose. The Israelites were adequately prepared to begin the conquest of Canaan. Their lack of faith to follow through delayed implementation of God's will for his holy nation. Our lack of faith in following God's direction limits our effectiveness in living a Christian witness.

Discussion question

- ◆ *Am I faithfully following God's direction in my life?*

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